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## **Women, Organizational Crisis and Access to Leadership in International Organizations**

*Women who successfully break the glass ceiling have historically done so in the context of crises. Crises offer unique windows of opportunity for women because they either legitimize women as suitable candidates or create 'glass cliffs' that make positions unattractive to men. This article examines four elections in the WHO, IMF and UNESCO, applying findings from the national to the international. First access to executive office international organizations – the breaking of the glass ceiling – is facilitated by organizational crisis; however, once broken, the importance of crises diminishes. Organizations become regendered or women become seen as acceptable candidates.*

**Key words:** international organizations, women, executive office, access, crisis

## INTRODUCTION

Regulatory and normative changes in international organizations have led to an increase of women in leadership positions, such as that of executive head of United Nations (UN) agencies (Haack 2014a). However, while there are more women in UN leadership positions, there are notable differences between different types of organizations, especially between the UN funds and programs, and the UN specialized agencies. While women have occupied executive positions in all but one of the funds and programs since 1987, the seventeen UN specialized agencies have seen only four women leaders, with three women in office in 2014. How did women break the ‘glass ceiling’ (Wirth 2001) in these less conducive environments, convincing their electorate of their leadership potential? Differences can be accounted for in part by the nature of the appointment process and the nature of the organization’s portfolio (Haack 2014b): As the UN funds and programs are largely soft, female portfolios and the specialized agencies are masculine portfolios, more women can be found in the former than in the latter. Secondly, the UN Secretary-General appoints executive heads in the funds and programs, while candidates for executive positions in the specialized agencies are elected by member states. Appointments reduce the potential for conflict over the choice of candidates, while elections bring to the fore not only differences in understanding of gender roles but also (geo-)political interests and bargaining, potentially preventing women’s access. However, while the nature of portfolios and the appointment process sheds light on the *likelihood* of women to access a particular type of organization, it does not account for the conditions that actually enable access. Here, the literature points to crises and instability as important factors (Genovese 1993a, Hodson 1997, Jalalzai 2008).

Historically crises have opened up unique windows of opportunity for women by offering an alternative to voters (here: member states) and clearly signaling change. In general, instability and crisis led to changes in leadership by forcing established leaders out in the hope that a new face will bring about change. This applies to candidates independent of gender as the cases of Wally N’Dow at UN-HABITAT and Jean-Pierre Hocke, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, shows. In 1997 N’Dow was forced to quit over questions of misspent funds, while Hocke’s

use of First Class air travel during times of budget cuts, a privilege only afforded to the Secretary-General at the time, led to his resignation. However, while men may be elected independently of critical political circumstances, women are elected only in crisis situations. In other words, successful access to office takes place in the context of crisis. Yet, despite historic evidence for the role of crises in women's access to office (such as in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan etc.), Jalalzai (2013) finds little statistical correlation between crisis and access. This paradox is explained by Duerst-Lahti's (1997) concept of 're-gendering'. According to Duerst-Lahti, organizations become regendered or, more simply, women become more 'acceptable' over time as more women access organizations. Thus, over time the importance of crises for women's access may diminish.

In this paper I will investigate the limited number of cases where women have led one of the UN specialized agencies to understand how these findings can be translated from the context of democratic politics to international organizations. Politically, an increase in the number of women in international organizations signals the potential for women to contribute to global governance, and models or incentivizes gender equality, especially to states where women's rights continue to be weak. Analytically, demystifying the process of accessing leadership roles in international organizations explains the long pipeline of women's success and engagement from the local to the global, as women politicians, activists and civil servants are appointed to international positions *after* they have established successful careers elsewhere. Here, I will show that successful women leaders who broke the glass ceiling i.e. who constituted the first generation of women leaders in a given organization, were elected in the context of organizational crisis. However, extending this I draw on Duerst-Lahti (1997) to show that second generation women executive heads can be successful in the absence of crises. First, I will revisit the literature on the role of political crisis in women's access to executive office and translate the concept of 'crisis' from the national domain to the international, defining 'crisis' as a crisis of legitimacy that derives from actual, potential and *perceived* organizational instability. Analyzing in turn the elections of Gro Harlem Brundtland to the World Health Organization (WHO), Irina Bokova to the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO), and Christine Lagarde to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), I will demonstrate that regional power politics are important factors in this context, as they may impact on the selection of women candidates. In

other words, where crises do occur they have a uniquely international character as regional alliances and power political concerns overlap with questions of corruption, mismanagement and misconduct. Finally, analyzing Margaret Chan's election to the World Health Organization (WHO), I will show that once the glass ceiling has been broken, the second generation of women leaders can be successful in the absence of crisis.

## **CRISIS AND ACCESS TO EXECUTIVE OFFICE**

Research studying women in politics highlights a variety of factors that influence women's pathways into political office, including the role of quotas (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012, Krook 2010), qualifications and connections (Schwindt-Bayer 2011), the nature of the role and the nature of the political system (Duerst-Lahti 1997, Jalalzai and Krook 2010, Jalalzai 2008), the role of the media and its representation of candidates (Murray 2010) as well as normative changes in the political environment (Krook and True 2010). However, in the context of the executive office Genovese (1993a), Hodson (1997) and Jalalzai (2008) showed that successful women leaders were elected in the context of crises and situations of political instability. Where the state had become dominated by corruption, oppression and political turmoil women offered an attractive alternative to the electorate in which 'female qualities' or family legacies, or both, played a critical role. In most cases where women accessed executive office during political crisis, women candidates built on the political legacy of a deceased or assassinated male relative and former political leader. Thus, women were not only able to draw on the name recognition factor and organizational inheritance (i.e. financial and other resources) of the deceased male politician (Hodson 1997) but could also promise a return to more stable times, such as during their relative's rule. Women's candidature thus expressed a filial duty of a loving wife or daughter, extending an ideal of female qualities of innocence, nurturing and caring from family to nation. They thus created a positive counter image to the corruption, oppression and nepotism practiced by men, making women into a potential leader that is acceptable to voters even in male-dominated societies (Jalalzai and Krook 2010). Alternatively, Ryan and Haslam argue (2007), crisis situations may favor women because leadership positions become so precarious,

i.e. subject to a greater likelihood of failure, that they become unattractive to men, thus creating 'glass cliffs'.

However, despite historic evidence of the importance of crises, Jalalzai (2013) found no statistical relevance for it. This finding may be the result of two factors: 1) the framing of the relationship, which states that all successful women were elected in the context of crisis, not that crises will lead to the election of women or a greater number of women, and 2) a disregard for changes over time. According to Duerst-Lahti (1997) organizations become regendered i.e. seen as more 'feminine' or more suitable for women once a woman has held the top job. Alternatively, women simply become more accepted as office-holders, showing that contextual circumstances may diminish over time, marking out different 'generations' of women leaders. For example, domestically the relationship between crisis, family and access tended to be strong in many of the cases of first generation of women leaders, yet recent research has shown that as more women are elected there is increasing variation in the extent to which political families matter (Thomas and Adams 2010) and the extent to which women play up (Thomas and Adams 2010) or down (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993, Dolan 2005) their gender.

As crises prove important contextual factors for women's access to office, facilitating a springboard from which to break the glass ceiling, how can these critical moments be measured and defined? Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (1998, 233) define organizational crises as "a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organizations' high-priority goals". Domestically, the degree or severity of the crisis need not extend to the political turmoil witnessed in countries such as Pakistan or the Philippines. Crises can also affect organizations such as political parties, creating uncertainty that equally favors women to access executive positions. For example, Wiliarty (2008) found that German Chancellor Angela Merkel's election to office followed a period of instability within her party following electoral after 16 years in government. The subsequent resignation of party leader and previous Chancellor Helmut Kohl and an internal party finance scandal allowed Merkel to emerge as the main candidate. In a corporatist catch-all party, in which members organize around specific constituencies, Merkel, as a woman, an East German and Protestant in a majority male, Western German and Catholic party, signaled a new start for the CDU.

By contrast, crises in international organizations (IO) can be actual crises as well *perceived* and *potential* crises. Actual crises come into being following mismanagement, corruption, fraud and (costly) mistakes that may lead to unexpected outcomes, contributing to (or at least not preventing) conflict, death and starvation. Examples of these crises can be found in the Oil-for-Food scandal, the failure to intervene in the Rwandan genocide and inappropriate or illegal behavior by peacekeepers (e.g. rape). Events such as these may undermine the IO's processes, output legitimacy or bureaucratic values. Moreover, they may become associated with a particular person, such as the UN Secretary-General, but more often tarnish the reputation of the organization in general, leading the public or member states to question the organization's usefulness. As such, crises in international organizations can emerge from potential or perceived threats to organizational goals and performance, making crises in IOs in the first instance crises of legitimacy.

Analysing multilateralism, Newman's (2007) reminds us that IOs only exist with the support and agreement of their member states, and that crises affect the fragile foundations of state support on which IOs are based. In emphasizing the need for state support, Newman's definition of crisis reflects the principles of the principal-agent literature and its central practice of delegation (Hawkins et al. 2006a, Brown 2010), while the organizational literature's focus on *reputation* (Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer 1998, Lange, Lee, and Dai 2011) hints at a solution to crises in IOs, be they of political or bureaucratic nature. While the principal-agent literature seeks to highlight how and why agency slack occurs, enabling agents (IOs) to act beyond their delegated powers, it also highlights that agency can be withdrawn if the organization does not fulfill its task as envisaged. In this context the organization's reputation is important insofar as IOs rely on member states' belief that the organization will fulfill shared needs (for cooperation), transparently, effectively and in the interest of member states. Where an organization's reputation is questioned, member states' support may weaken or be withdrawn (Hawkins et al. 2006b), as could be seen in the 1970s and 1980s in processes that have been described as 'politicization' (see Imber 1989, Dutt 1995).

In contrast to crises emerging from mismanagement and corruption, politicization relates to the deliberate use of the organization as a tool to pursue specific agendas, in particular where those agendas run counter to the largest UN contributors, the United States and European member states. Politicization occurred

primarily in the UN specialized agencies due to different expectations of the organization and the appropriate provision of public goods. While developed states believed that specialized agencies are mainly functional organization, solving problems of underdevelopment through economic and technical transfer, developing states saw the specialized agencies as political platforms to raise broader questions of political, economic and social justice, thus shifting the debate from cooperation and standardization to the restructuring of international relations and the global economy (Williams 1987). At the same time as developing countries used UN agencies to grow their own power globally, socialist states sought to use the same for an extension of class struggle (Beigbeder 1987), while Arab states sought to concertedly deal with Israel (Dutt 1995). In trying to achieve their respective aims, member states used a variety of strategies that ultimately unsettled and destabilized organizations, creating uncertainty as to their future functioning (Ghebali 1985).

In the context of politicization crises became exacerbated by the withdrawal of main funders, such as the US and the UK, or the refusal to pay membership dues. In other words, actual, potential and perceived crisis are intimately connected, reinforcing each other, in particular where the interests of the US, any of the Permanent 5 or other powerful Western states are concerned. The successful women candidates analyzed here were all elected in the context of these institutions, which have seen considerable politicization in the past – the UN specialized agencies.

## **METHODOLOGY AND CASE SELECTION**

This study analyses the elections of four women to the role of executive head in the UN system, namely Gro Harlem Brundtland (Norway), Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) from 1998 to 2003, Margaret Chan (Hong Kong, China), Director-General of the WHO since 2007, Irina Bokova (Bulgaria), Director-General of UNESCO since 2009, and Christine Lagarde (France), Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since 2011. Using newspaper articles, biographies and rare references to IO elections in the literature, I paint a rich picture of those election processes in which women have been successful. In the context of studying access to leadership, this study highlights the conditions that unite successful elections while also showing developments over time. This research design has been



chosen in order to analyze the claim that successful women candidates accessed executive roles *only* in the context of crisis (Genovese 1993b, Hodson 1997, Jalalzai 2008). While a large-n study may demonstrate what happens to women candidates in the absence of crisis by focusing on the difference between successful and unsuccessful candidates, this study focuses on successful women candidates, highlighting differences between those who broke the glass ceiling (first generation) and those that followed (second generation). Generally, this study seeks to explore and illustrate how election processes in international organizations play out. In doing so, this analysis highlights a range of related issues of importance for women candidates, such as media portrayals of women candidates (Murray 2010; see Lagarde's election) and the question how women candidates draw on feminine qualities in their campaign. This opens up avenues for further research of women in politics beyond the study of parliaments and governments.

This approach takes into account two key limitations: First, the overall number of women in international organizations remains small. Women have been executive leaders in the UN funds and programs since 1987 and in the specialized agencies since 1998. Elsewhere in the UN system women have acted as envoys and special representatives of the Secretary-General, or led departments of the UN Secretariat, regional commissions or funds, while eighteen regional organizations have had a woman leader. Rachel Crowdy (UK) was a pioneer in leading the League of Nations' Department of Opium Traffic and Social Issues Section from 1919 to 1931, however the majority of women accessed office only after 2000. In order to ensure comparability of successful women candidates, I focus on the UN system (i.e. organizational portfolios with global reach), roles with operational responsibility, and appointment processes that are subject to elections by member states. This excludes regional organizations such as the African Union and the Colombo Plan, as well as regional commissions within the UN system. Also excluded are international judges, special representatives and envoys, who lack operational responsibilities. Despite operational responsibilities, decision-making power and global portfolios, women who lead UN departments are excluded from the study as they report directly to the UN Secretary-General. Finally, the focus is on women in the UN specialized agencies as they, unlike their counterparts in regional organizations, face a global and therefore heterogeneous electorate, which translates into similar patterns of recognition for

gender equality as well as similar (geo-)political interests that frame the election process.

The position of executive head in international organizations is of dual nature: professional-bureaucratic as well as political. This is also expressed in the selection process. Unlike in electoral politics, where a minimum age and nationality circumscribe eligibility to elected positions, candidates for the role of executive heads in UN agencies are subject to criteria more closely resembling those of professional job descriptions. While most candidates are national of member states, other nationals (esp. Swiss) have led UN agencies. The WHO requires candidates to be in good physical condition (subject to examination by a WHO physician), while UNESCO makes no stipulations regarding the candidate's qualifications. The IMF candidate profile states that a candidate must be a national of the IMF's 185 member states and less than 65 years old, further stipulating that the position cannot be held beyond the seventieth birthday (IMF 2014). IMF candidates are to have a distinguished record in economic policymaking at senior levels, an outstanding professional background and the requisite managerial and diplomatic skills to lead a global organization. In 2007 the IMF Board noted that "a firm commitment to advancing the IMF's goals by building consensus on key policy and institutional issues, including through close collaboration with the Executive Board" is required. The candidate profile was amended in 2011 by the requirement to "have a firm commitment to, and an appreciation of, multilateral cooperation and will have a demonstrated capacity to be objective and impartial" (IMF 2014). These similarities to a professional employment process continue elsewhere: Curriculum vitae have to be submitted to the relevant board, which then draws up a shortlist. At the WHO candidates submit a 2,000 word supporting statement of how they meet the requirements and are given 30 minutes in a one hour interview to present their future vision for the organization.

These procedures are complemented by political processes, which make the election of candidates in international organizations more comparable to electoral politics than to the hiring of board members or CEOs in the private sector. First, once a vacancy is announced, candidatures are invited. Candidates rarely, if ever, nominate themselves but are put forward by member states (mostly but not exclusively their own nationals). Candidates then engage in 'campaigns', which involve visiting member states from which they seek to gain support. During this process some candidates may drop out if support seems unlikely. Once the deadline for nominations

has been reached and any unsuitable candidates eliminated, secret ballots will to determine the successful candidate. The WHO Executive Board determines the shortlist of five candidates through secret elections in which each of the 34 Board members may list five preferred candidate. Shortlisted candidates are interviewed. This is followed by secret ballot in which only one candidate may be chosen. Repeated rounds of voting, at the end of which the candidate with the lowest vote is eliminated, determine the final choice (WHO 2011). By contrast, the IMF's 24-member Executive Board draws up a shortlist of three candidates, which will be followed by meetings with the candidates. The IMF insists that “although the Executive Board may select a Managing Director by a majority of the votes cast, the objective of the Executive Board is to select the Managing Director by consensus” (IMF 2014). Voting, including the drawing up of the shortlist, takes into account the IMF’s weighted voting system, which gives more votes to larger economies. Following a ‘gentleman’s agreement’, previous IMF candidates have all been European, while US citizens lead the World Bank. By contrast, UNESCO’s selection process is highly secretive: the 58 member Executive Board receives nominations confidentially, the Board’s meeting is held in private and the ballot is secret. Candidates need to achieve an absolute majority in five possible rounds of voting, followed by a secret ballot in the General Assembly to approve the Board’s nominated candidate (UNESCO 2010). The process’ secrecy highlights how critical the election of Irina Bokova was, as it was broadly covered in the news.

A second limitation are the considerable limitations in the availability of information on these election processes. Despite recent scholarly interest in IO executive heads and their leadership (Haack and Kille 2012, Reinalda and Kille 2012), little is known about how and why women (or indeed men) access executive office in international organizations due the secrecy of the election process and the fact that appointments hardly receive public notice. Thus, very little information is available about nomination, selection and decision-making processes, or indeed candidates.<sup>1</sup> Where references to elections or appointments are made, they tend to be short and anecdotal, hidden in the histories of individual IOs. Fortunately, in recent years IO enthusiasts have started to cover appointments and elections of leadership

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, some IOs provide no information on their executive heads beyond their nationality and date of birth. Thus, in some cases, IO executive heads have faded into obscurity.

positions in international organizations, providing some insight.<sup>2</sup> In a 24-hour news cycle, particular controversial selection processes now also attract attention. Indeed, Irina Bokova's election to the position of UNESCO Director-General and Christine Lagarde's election to the position of IMF Managing Director were both the first and one of the best covered election processes, given the nature of the political context in which these elections took place. Coinciding with the first wave of women breaking the glass ceiling, these changes now better enable us to study how and why women access IO executive positions. Thus, this analysis brings together a range of data and information to provide a rich picture of elections in international organizations and specifically women's elections.

The following section will in turn analyze the elections of Gro Harlem Brundtland to the World Health Organization (WHO), Irina Bokova to the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO), Christine Lagarde to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Margaret Chan to the World Health Organization (WHO), showing that crises play an important role in three of the four cases. The crises involved here are not the same and indeed can be multi-dimensional, however they afford women unique opportunities to break the glass ceiling i.e. to access executive office in international organizations for the first time.

## **BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING**

In the UN specialized agencies crises afforded women unique opportunities to access executive office. This was facilitated by an election process in which executive heads are elected directly by member states (i.e. by limited membership executive boards) and not appointed solely by the Secretary-General, as is the case with other senior appointments in the UN system. Candidates take part in small election campaigns in which they seek to secure the support of a number of member states, covering a sufficiently large geographic range of states. While the principle of regional rotation for executive positions exists as a gentleman's agreement, regional interests, regional allegiances and vote jockeying all play a part in the election process, also potentially

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<sup>2</sup> See Tony Fleming's highly rated blog of UN Secretary-General elections (<http://www.unsg.org/>) and UNelections, a project of the World Federalist Movement - Institute for Global Policy (WFM-IGP), (<http://www.unelections.org>).

opening up opportunities for crises. Thus, candidates have been considered “highly political animals” (Williams 1987), more concerned with their majority support, which does not necessarily correspond to the largest contributors. Women candidates thus benefit from both organizational crises that can be addressed by their unique qualities, as well as the dynamics of geopolitical power politics.

*Gro Harlem Brundtland (WHO, 1998-2003)*

The election of Gro Harlem Brundtland (Norway) to the position of World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General in 1998 mirrors the crisis theory very closely. As the WHO prepared for its fiftieth anniversary in 1998, the organization showed “symptoms of a dying organization” (Edwards 1997). The leadership of Director-General Hiroshi Nakajima (Japan) had left the organization in a state of instability, with low morale across the organization and its staff, a bloated bureaucracy that was larger at the center than in the field, financial mismanagement and consequently disillusionment among member states. Nakajima was accused of cronyism, racism against African states and ‘misplaced budget priorities’ (Freedman 1998). Nakajima had made personal enemies both inside and outside the organization, with poor English and French language skills contributing to this lack of support. The United States were indeed strongly opposed to Nakajima (he was said to have kept his job primarily because of Japanese support) (Edwards 1997), amplifying instability and uncertainty about WHO’s future, which opened up as a result. In the context of this organizational crisis opportunities opened up for women candidates to compete and succeed in accessing WHO executive leadership.

In April 1997 Nakajima announced that he would not run for a third term. After a six-month campaign period, elections for a new Director-General were to be held from 19-28 January. Seven candidates emerged, of which one soon withdrew: Fernando Antezana (Bolivia), Nakajima’s deputy, withdrew his bid for the Director-Generalship after the American network CBS alleged on its program “60 minutes” that Antezana had lied about his qualifications. Harvard University and San Simon University, Bolivia, from whom Antezana claimed to have received degrees in public health and international relations, and a doctorate in pharmacology, both denied having conferred such qualifications. However, rather than being just an embarrassing incidence Antezana’s apparent dishonesty hinted at deeper, more structural problems

at WHO. It suggested that the existing WHO leadership was deeply entrenched in corrupt practices, which had become institutionalized by Nakajima. Thus, in order to replace the old leadership with new, fresh and untainted names, the WHO required an outsider to overhaul its mismanaged operations and its poor reputation.

Among the six candidates running for the position of Director-General, Gro Harlem Brundtland was the only European, and indeed the only candidate from a developed country. Ibrahim Malick Samba (Gambia), WHO Regional Director for Africa and endorsed by the Organization for African Unity (OAU), and Aref Batayneh (Jordan), previously Jordanian health minister, represented the African constituency of WHO. Asia was represented by Nafis Sadik (Pakistan), Executive Director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), who was supported by the Group of 77, and Uton Muchtar Rafei (Indonesia), WHO Regional Director for Southeast Asia. Sir George Alleyne (Barbados), the highly respected director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), was the sole Latin American candidate after Antezana withdrew. Alleyne was supported by Canada, Argentina, Brazil and the Caribbean countries (Crossette 1998).

In the first round of secret balloting no clear loser emerged. In the second round Samba then scored the fewest votes, while Sadik, who had been very confident about her candidacy and was considered Brundtland's 'toughest competitor', was eliminated in the third round (Crossette 1998, Freedman 1998). Despite her strong position, Sadik was said to have suffered from a split in the Asian vote, while Brundtland could gain the support of a broad range of regional support. Indeed, the United States, although due to regional rotation not on the Executive Board, supported Brundtland's candidacy. As the largest contributor to the WHO budget (25%), the US endorsement was an important one. Thus, in the fourth round of voting, Brundtland won 18 of the 17 required votes, with Alleyne winning ten and Uton winning four votes (Kaban 1998).

At the beginning of the voting process, Boyer (1998) summarized the overall feeling that "[a]lthough all six candidates are trained doctors, it is more their political muscle and their ability to change WHO's image which be brought under scrutiny after Nakajima's two heavily-criticized mandates". Brundtland certainly had the qualifications to lead WHO and had gained international recognition through her chairmanship on the World Commission on Environment and Development and its report 1987 *Our Common Future*, today commonly known by Brundtland's name.

Brundtland is a trained medical doctor with a degree in public health from Harvard University. She worked for some time as a physician and as a scientist in the Norwegian health ministry but, having been politically active as a member of the Norwegian Labor Party since childhood, became Minister of the Environment in 1974. Breaking the glass ceiling in Norwegian politics, Brundtland subsequently served three, non-consecutive terms as Prime Minister of Norway. According to Altman (1998), as the daughter of a political physician and a cabinet minister, her path from medicine to politics was a 'natural' one. To Brundtland health was political and she had called for doctors to participate more in politics, stating that those with knowledge of science should make health politics. Despite not being without controversy herself – her call for the right to abortion had in the past angered both Muslims and Catholics – she had a reputation as a strong diplomat and politician. She was considered such a dominant force that cartoonists would only show her ankles and shoes with tiny politicians around her. Although she was named for a number of high-profile UN positions, including that of the newly created Deputy-Secretary-General position, Brundtland favored the Director-Generalship of the WHO (Brundtland 2002).

The expectations of Brundtland to 'heal the WHO' (Kaban 1998) were great. Indeed, Nakajima's leadership was so unpopular among WHO staff that on hearing of Brundtland's election, WHO professional staff emerged from their offices and cheered. Although Alleyne had also been successful as a reformer, Brundtland was seen by member states as the candidate most likely to reform the organization overall (Brown 1998, Brundtland 2002). During her election campaign Brundtland would often find support by not even mentioning her campaign, let alone her gender and her potential as a woman candidate. Instead, she focused on discussing health issues affecting the countries she visited, the importance of global public health and the importance of the WHO in addressing these issues (Brundtland 2002). On her election Brundtland thus stated that her first priority would be to attend to internal reforms and shift attention to health issues in developing countries, making a clear move away from her predecessor's policies and actions. Brundtland did not seek re-election after one term and was succeeded by Lee Jong-wook (South Korea) in 2003.

Irina Bokova's election to the position of UNESCO Executive Director was an example of the kind of politicization that had affected the organization in the past. More than any other UN agency, UNESCO has been the battleground for ideological and cultural conflicts – perhaps unsurprising given its remit in education, culture, science and world heritage. UNESCO has at its heart the question of identity and the liberal internationalist ideals of peace through understanding and cooperation. With such 'soft' foundations and no 'hard' sanctions, UNESCO's politicization was seen by many as being part and parcel of international cooperation in this field (Lyons, Baldwin, and McNemar 1977, Dutt 1995). In the past this has, as described above, led to considerable organizational instability as members accused each other not only of trying to erode liberal principles, e.g. through the promotion of the New International Communication Order, but also of using UNESCO for polemics and propaganda by systematically inserting extraneous issues on the agenda or forcing through resolutions of normative content (Ghebali 1985). This led to the withdrawal of the United States in 1984 and the United Kingdom in 1985 (both rejoined in 2003 and 1997 respectively). The issue of Israel certainly has remained a contentious one throughout UNESCO's history<sup>3</sup>, contributing significantly to its (and other organizations') politicization. This was played out again in the 2009 executive head election. While campaign negotiations usually take place between governments and away from the public's view, the events of this campaign, notably the issues surrounding the Egyptian candidate, all opened up the campaign process, creating a degree of instability.

At the end of Koïchiro Matsuura's (Japan) term as UNESCO Executive Director the Executive Board called for nominations by 31 May 2009, allowing candidates to submit a vision paper of 2,000 words by 1 August. This was to be followed by interviews during the 7-23 September session. A candidate had to win at least 30 of the 58 votes of the Executive Board. Regulations state that a candidate has to be chosen within a maximum number of five rounds of secret balloting. Choosing from a list of eight candidates, the Board did indeed require an unprecedented five rounds to determine a successor to Matsuura. Women contested the position of Executive Director for the first time (Flamini 2009), representing the Western Europe and Others group (Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Austria), Eastern Europe (Irina Bokova,

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<sup>3</sup> The recent recognition of Palestine as a member state by UNESCO, following a rejection of the same proposal in the UN General Assembly is one example.



Bulgaria; Ina Marčiulionyte, Lithuania) and Latin America (Ivonne Baki, Ecuador). Other candidates included African Regional Director of the International Council for Science Sospeter Muhongo (Tanzania), UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Africa Nourine Tidjani-Serpos (Benin), Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Yakovenko (Russia) and Minister of Culture Farouk Hosny (Egypt). Following regional rotation, it was expected that the future candidate would most likely represent the African group. Thus, Farouk Hosny, the African group's front-runner, was considered a likely successor to Matsuura. However, controversial remarks by Hosny and strategic voting among competing European candidates led to the surprise election of Bokova.

Opposition to Hosny came from UNESCO member states but also from civil society groups, the media and public individuals. Hosny, who had been Minister of Culture in Egypt for 22 years, had previously claimed that he would burn Jewish books in Egyptian libraries if he could. This angered not only the Israeli, US and German governments, but also saw French intellectual dragging this election into the public limelight (Lehnartz 2009). Although Hosny apologized in *Le Monde* and sought to clarify that the statement was made in a heated debate in the Egyptian parliament, the opposition sought to outmaneuver Hosny. In the first round of balloting Hosny indeed led the field with 22 votes, with runner-up Bokova receiving eight votes and Ferrero-Waldner, Baki and Yakovenko each receiving seven votes. The three remaining candidates received seven votes in total: Marčiulionyte 3, Tidjani-Serpos 2 and Muhongo 2). Due to their low votes Marčiulionyte, Tidjani-Serpos and Muhongo withdrew in the third round.

It was clear that the number of European candidates divided the vote, thus splitting any opposition to Hosny. In the second round Yakovenko's votes dropped from seven to three after Russia announced that it would give \$20 million to UNESCO if Yakovenko won. This attempt of vote buying was not well received in an already heated election environment. Thus, Yakovenko's four votes went to Hosny, Ferrero-Waldner and Baki, further highlighting the problem of multiple European candidates, and indeed women candidates. The withdrawal of three low-scoring candidates now enhanced Bokova's vote (13 to Hosny's 25, with Ferrero-Waldner gaining eleven votes and Baki nine votes (UNelections.org 2009). While Baki was apparently persuaded by the US to withdraw in the fourth round of voting in order to support Bokova, Ferrero-Waldner voluntarily withdrew, having made clear that she

wished to see a European candidate and a woman to win (Pöll 2009). Thus, both Baki and Ferrero-Waldner withdrew for tactical reasons, leaving Bokova able to draw with Hosny at 29 votes in the fourth round. In the fifth round of voting, Bokova won with 31 to 27 votes (UNelections.org 2009).

Despite her eventual success, to some Bokova's resume was not without question marks. Bokova is the daughter of the communist Bulgarian state newspaper editor and government favorite, and educated at elite Moscow universities in International Relations. She joined the Bulgarian UN diplomatic mission in 1976 and became politically engaged after the fall of communism. She was a popular member of the Socialist Party (former Communist Party) and First Deputy Foreign Minister from 1995 to 1997, briefly Foreign Minister, candidate for the vice-presidency in 1996, and a member of parliament for the Socialist Party from 2001 to 2005. Thus, she was described as one of the 'new Bulgarian elite': one who benefits from old contacts but who also emancipates themselves from the same (Lehnartz 2009).

While all women candidates performed better than the majority of male candidates, with the exception of Hosny and Yakovenko, the association of both men with scandal and improper behavior meant that women candidates could benefit at each stage of elimination. Moreover, regional alliances were played out through the withdrawal of certain candidates in order to enhance the chances of Bokova over Hosny, with African and Asian countries citing Hosny's 'poor English' as an important reason for not voting for him (Sharma 2009). However, at the heart of the crisis that afforded Bokova access to leadership were Hosny's remarks that had the potential to cause *future* crisis and uncertainty within an organization that has suffered from politicization in the past. Unlike on previous occasions that concerned issue relating to Israel and Judaism, the controversy surrounding Hosny's remarks was related to the fact that this was not a broad challenge to the legitimacy of Israel's participation in UNESCO or the existence of the Israeli state, but that it directly challenged UNESCO's mission: culture. It thus politicized not only the question of the equality of cultures but also demonstrated Hosny's views on the treatment of cultural products; leading Flamini (2009) to wryly note: "Book burning is not exactly a suitable sentiment in a candidate with ambitions to direct global efforts to further culture, science, education, climate change, women's rights, as well as preserving world heritage". It is perhaps ironic then that in contrast to its allies in Europe and the

US, Israel dropped its opposition to Hosny as it was said to have struck a deal with Egypt on security cooperation in Gaza (Daly 2009).

*Christine Lagarde (IMF, 2011- )*

In Christine Lagarde's case the existence of both internal organizational crisis and external crisis, i.e. the global financial crisis with focus in Europe, opened up a window of opportunity for Lagarde's access to executive office. Choosing Lagarde served the two purposes of providing an alternative to the male incumbent and maintaining regional, here European, control.

On 14 May 2011 IMF Managing Director (MD) Dominique Strauss-Kahn (France) was arrested at New York's JFK airport for the alleged sexual assault of a New York hotel housekeeper. He was first detained without bail, and then set free on 19 May, following the payment of bail. Before paying bail, Strauss-Kahn resigned from his IMF post on 18 May and John Lipsky (US), First Deputy Managing Director, was named Acting Managing Director. The search for a new MD began, with a deadline set for shortlisting by 30 June 2011. With the arrest of its MD the organization and with it the regime of global financial management started to experience organizational instability. The nature of the allegations and the style of arrest, which many in Europe saw as harsh, caused concern among IMF member states as the organization was a key partner in the negotiation of the Euro zone's financial sovereign debt crisis. Yet, for Lagarde the nature of the allegations and the media portrayal of Strauss-Kahn supported her candidature, as did the European financial crisis.

Voting for the position of MD followed the voting share patterns used across the IMF. With 16.7% the US holds the largest share of votes, followed by Japan with 6% and European countries collectively holding 30%. However, while a majority of 85% is required on all issues, including the election of the MD, the Executive Board of 24 Directors generally seeks to make decisions based on consensus. In total five candidates were considered before the election, including Grigory Marchenko, head of the central bank of Kazakhstan, and Trevor Manuel, South African finance minister. Both were named but did not proceed to selection stage. The Israeli nominee, Bank of Israel governor Stanley Fischer, was not considered by the Board, taking into account the IMF's age limit for MDs. Only Lagarde and Agustín Carstens, IMF Deputy MD and former Mexican finance minister, were eventually shortlisted.

Strauss-Kahn, who first denied the allegations and then claimed that sex had been consensual, was seen on television disheveled and unshaven in court, appearing diminished in stature. The moral corruption of a man as alleged rapist thus contrasted sharply with the image of Christine Lagarde as a professional woman and competent finance minister. Notably, this image did not necessarily follow stereotypical gender patterns. Although Lagarde was keen to raise the issue of gender, highlighting that as a woman she would bring ‘diversity’ and ‘balance’ to the institution (IMF 2011), references to ‘female qualities’ of nurturing and caring were seldom made. Instead, commentators referred to her professional achievements as a lawyer and French finance minister, and favorably compared her appearance and lifestyle to male competitors.

Lagarde’s professional credentials certainly supported her case but also helped to create an image of a woman who combined the merits of a professional and disciplined man with the elegance and charm of a woman – essentially styling the cosmopolitan, globetrotting business professional. Lagarde was educated in France and the United States, and trained as an anti-trust and labor lawyer. She joined the international law firm Baker and McKenzie in Chicago and rose through the ranks to become its first woman leader. She subsequently became France’s first woman (and longest serving) finance minister in 2007 and with it the first woman finance minister of a G8 country. Lagarde became the highest profile ‘architect’ of the European response to the Greek crisis, and following this, gained popularity among fellow politicians based on her “deftness in international negotiations to stabilize the world economy” and her “excellent English, [her] direct manner and relatively pristine image” (Keller 2011). Commentators noted that she was “a skillful and pragmatic negotiator with excellent connections [and with a] reputation for being straightforward and frank” (Steininger 2011). Thus, Lagarde created

“an almost surreal aura of veneration. This is combined with a nuanced command of English, a precise intellect and unnerving stamina. People talk about Lagarde with admiration that borders on hero worship. She ‘radiates charm’, she ‘oozes respect’; she’s described variously as intelligent, beautiful, upstanding and elegant. In short, they usually conclude, *Elle a de la classe* (‘she’s got class’)” (Guinness 2010).

Indeed, references to her appearance were common. Commentators noted her elegance, expressed in her white hair, her tan, her tall, slim figure and her ‘impeccable

dress'. Importantly, commentators noted she lived a rather 'un-French' lifestyle: Lagarde is a vegetarian and does not drink alcohol. As a teenager she was a member of the French national synchronized swimming team and still swims, cycles and goes to the gym every day (Gavaghan 2011, Guinness 2010).

According to Murray (2010), the appearance of women in politics receives disproportionately more attention by the media than male candidates. Murray notes that this undermines the substantive message of women candidates, framing them as sexual and visual rather than powerful and intellectual. However, the attention paid to Lagarde's appearance indeed strengthened her position by not only emphasizing the power and intellectual side of this professional woman, but also by portraying her as a disciplined and 'ascetic' individual – an image sharply in contrast to the then disgraced Strauss-Kahn and her competitor Carstens, whose qualifications were equally strong as Lagarde's. Again, in line with Murray's findings, the male candidate's appearance attracted less attention than Lagarde's, with commentators rarely commenting on his 'portliness'. Few international papers discussed his apparent morbid obesity, despite regular mocking exercised by the Mexican press (Luhnow 2011). Yet one blogger's question – "Is Agustín Carstens Too Fat to be IMF Chief?" (McIntyre 2011) – gained particularly in importance as Strauss-Kahn's schedule had become 'grueling' under the demands of the economic crisis. Thus, McIntyre's question concerning Carstens' health placed Lagarde's qualities in an even more positive light. Thus, the woman candidate's 'clean and healthy' character stood in stark contrast to two men who failed on women (Strauss-Kahn) and food (Carstens). Indeed, Lagarde's positive image was so strong that it could withstand the judicial investigation into her role in the Tapie affair, which involved the controversial payment of a €285m arbitration payment to Bernard Tapie, following the sales of sports company Adidas in 2005 when Lagarde was finance minister.

Despite significant image differences, an important factor in choosing Lagarde over Carstens was related to another dimension of instability and the geopolitical dimensions of the financial crisis at the time. Following a gentleman's agreement, an American traditionally leads the World Bank, while the IMF's leader had always hailed from Europe. Developing countries had for some time contested the continued institutional dominance of developed states in the IMF. The institutional power of IMF members (i.e. their voting share) is determined by their relative economic size in the global economy and their share in the IMF. With a global shift in economic

power, developing countries had argued that the IMF no longer sufficiently reflected the global economic status and that therefore the IMF needed to reflect this change institutionally, including the role of the MD. As a result of this, the then head of the Eurogroup of finance ministers Jean-Claude Juncker had stated in November 2007 (at the appointment of Strauss-Kahn), that the next MD to lead the IMF would not be a European. This was supported the IMF members' 2008 agreement to rebalance the quota system in order to reflect the increasing weight of emerging markets in the global economy, moving 6% of the quota towards the BRIC countries. Carstens' supporters, such as Australia and Canada, highlighted this agreement in their attempt to see Carstens elected as MD. Yet, the sovereign debt and liquidity crisis in Europe in 2011 made lenders into potential recipients, with the crisis moving into the backyard of too many of the main IMF shareholders. Although Carstens claimed that Lagarde's involvement as MD in the EU financial crisis would be a conflict of interest, European countries stood firmly behind Lagarde. They insisted that only a European candidate would be appropriate to deal with an essentially European problem (Shrestha 2011).

The election of Christine Lagarde to the position of IMF Managing Director not only shows the relevance of the crisis theory and the specific geopolitical and power political dimensions of access to executive office in the context of international organizations, it also highlights how Lagarde was able to break a new path for women leaders: While certainly not the first woman to lead a UN specialized agency, or indeed the first woman to hold a senior position of this kind within the UN system, Lagarde is the first woman to break the so-called 'glass walls' that have confined women thus far to softer, female agendas (Wirth 2001), such as the environment (UNEP, UN-HABITAT), children and women (UNICEF, UN-WOMEN), education (UNESCO), health (UNFPA), welfare (UNDP, WFP, UNRWA) and human rights (UNHCR). In accessing a financial institution, in particular in times of global financial crisis, meant that Lagarde has made a considerable step into a man's world. Crisis and Lagarde's image and qualities as a professional woman played a significant role in this breakdown of gender barriers.

## **STEPPING OVER GLASS SHARDS: THE SECOND GENERATION**

Given the small number of women elected to the UN specialized agencies, only tentative conclusions can be drawn as to how and why women are elected *after* an agency has had a woman leader. Thus far only the World Health Organization has had two women leaders and a first glance at the ‘second generation’ suggests that organizational crisis may be less important in this. This is consistent with Duerst-Lahti’s (1997) finding that once an office has had a woman leader it becomes re-gendered as feminine or creates greater acceptance for the possibility of a future woman leader. However, regional alliances and geo-political power politics may persist, influencing the election of women candidates in different ways. Instead of favoring a candidate based on their gender and specific gender traits, gender may become more incidental to the support given by a specific state or region. The absence of crisis and instability may thus enable candidates from regional groups other than the Western Europe and Others Group (which includes the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) to access office. While this may apply to both genders, measuring the relationship between success, gender and regional support across all leadership elections is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, a brief discussion of Margaret Chan’s election to WHO Director-Generalship assesses the effect of second-generation leadership contests on women’s access to executive office.

*Margaret Chan (WHO, 2006- )*

Brundtland’s successor at the WHO, Lee Jong-wook (South Korea), died in May 2006 at the age of 61, following a bleeding in the brain. At the time Jong-wook had completed only three years of his five-year tenure. Without any external or internal crisis causing any obvious organizational instability, an acting Director-General, Anders Nordström (Sweden), was appointed and the selection process for a new Director-General initiated. This included a six-month campaign period. Dr Margeret Chan was the fifth candidate to announce her candidature, followed by another five candidate, who announced their candidatures in August. Two candidates withdrew before the November election.

Chan had previously been Hong Kong’s Director of Health and joined WHO in 2003 to follow a varied two-year career from Director of the Department for Protection of the Human Environment to Director for Communicable Diseases Surveillance and Response, and in September 2005 to Assistant Director-General for Communicable Diseases. Her nomination indicated an intention by the Chinese

government to enhance cooperation between China and the WHO, and for China, who had never fielded any leader of an UN agency, to play a more active international role (Moy, Leung, and Benitez 2006). Like Bokova, Chan faced a broad field of competitors for this role. This included five Europeans, one Latin American, one African and two Middle Eastern candidates, as well as two rival Asian candidates. Elena Salgado of Spain was Chan's only woman competitor. Julio Frenk, Mexico's minister of health, was generally considered as the favorite candidate.

The presence of several candidates representing one region was seen by many commentators as a problem. This applied in particular to those nominated by the Western European and Others group, but also to the three Asian candidates. Here, the favorite was Shigeru Omi (Japan). However, after the first elimination round and several rounds of balloting in which the 34 member Executive Board cast secret votes on each candidate, Chan's election became a possibility. With only those candidates proceeding who received at least 18 votes, and with only five candidates going forward to interview stage, the competition had narrowed down to Margaret Chan (32 votes), Shigeru Omi (31 votes), Julio Frenk (30 votes), Kazem Behbehani of Kuwait (28 votes) and Elena Salgado (28 votes).

Regional alliances often dominate the first round of voting. Here, the elimination of some candidates, such as the African candidate who united the seven African board members behind him, changed the dynamics of regional alliances in the second round. China was convinced that African representatives would rally behind their candidate and hosted an 'unprecedented' two day summit with 48 African nations in Beijing, cancelling \$1.3bn of debt to 31 of the most indebted African nations and applied zero-tariff treatment to 190 categories of import commodities to 29 African countries at the summit. Critics suggested that China had thus 'bought' the election for Chan, stating that Chan's international experience was the weakest among all candidates. (Yung 2006).

The absence of crisis or organizational instability in this context, especially when compared to the 2008-9 UNESCO election and the Russian attempt to buy the election, suggests that neither the process of vote jockeying nor Chan's candidacy were considered as inappropriate or potentially detrimental to the organizations' stability in future. Neither Chan's qualifications nor her politics or China's intentions appeared to suggest that the organization's mission and values could be undermined by Chan's leadership. Moreover, seeds for crisis in which Chinese actions would



create further crisis momentum did not exist. Thus, Chan was elected to lead the WHO as Director-General with 24 votes over Omi's nine votes. In November 2011 Chan was the only person nominated (by China) to lead the WHO for a second term, starting from June 2012. Chan was re-elected without opposition, further attesting to the appropriateness of both candidate and the 2006 election process in election member states' eyes.

## CONCLUSION

Although the General Assembly recognized in its 1997 resolution 51/67 that the goal of equal gender representation for UN staff may not be met, especially at policy-making and decision-making levels (i.e. Under-Secretary-General, Assistant Secretary-General and D1-2 respectively), clearly more member states have heeded the call to nominate women candidates for executive positions. Crisis, organizational or otherwise, and with it uncertainty and instability have influenced election processes in all first-time elections, i.e. where women broke the glass ceiling. Crisis and instability have influenced both Brundtland's and Lagarde's chances to access leadership positions, while in Bokova's case crisis and instability emerged from the election itself. Here, the choice of a woman candidate meant avoiding the *potential* threat of *future* crisis by rejecting a highly controversial candidate. In all three cases women were seen as an alternative to the existing leadership – an alternative that promised change, stability, organizational transparency and personal integrity over corruption, controversy and 'immorality'.

However, unlike in domestic politics, crises in IOs influence appointment processes in different ways, with power politics, geo-political agendas and regional alliances providing an additional layer of decision-making that has worked in favor of the women leaders concerned here. Notably, Brundtland, Bokova and Lagarde accessed office on the strength of support from the Western European and Others group, highlighting that 'crises' are often a symptom of situations in which either Western interests or Western values (such as transparency and accountability) were at stake. While there clearly is a relationship between organizational crises that threaten Western member states' status and values and election outcomes, further study is

required to understand whether this is gender-specific or whether this applies to both men and women.

Finally, researchers studying women in domestic contexts noted that family ties are often related to crises, especially where crisis implies the continuation of a male relative's political legacy. At first glance this link between family and crisis may appear counterintuitive in international organizations where nepotism and patronage are considered taboo. However, the recourse to fellow politicians, such as Brundtland (former prime minister), Lagarde (finance minister) and Bokova (member of parliament, former foreign minister), in the context of organizational crises suggests that kinship does indeed play a role. In the context of crises member states appear to regard fellow politicians as more reliable to address and solve problems than candidates with experience gained primarily in administrative contexts. Thus, Margaret Chan, who was elected during times of organizational stability, is the only former civil servant among the four women leading the specialized agencies. With experience in senior roles in the Hong Kong civil service and the WHO, Chan may have had the knowledge and know-how of how to lead an organization but lacked experience in negotiating a diplomatic path between member states' interests.

In conclusion, while women may still have glass ceilings to break in a number of international organizations, the presence of women in high-profile organizations such as the IMF, repeated election to organizations in the (male) science area and the general improvement in the number of women candidates suggests that women executive leaders will no longer be an exception in future but become the norm in organizations that value and promote diversity.

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